Animal Health Safeguarding Review
Implementation Progress Report
February 2004

I. Progress achieved in implementing the review:

Response

- Training for new wildlife disease biologists - In February 2004, APHIS Wildlife Services sponsored a training session for 23 newly-hired wildlife disease biologists. These biologists are stationed throughout the country and are charged with developing and implementing a National Wildlife Disease Monitoring and Surveillance System and an Emergency Response System which support the needs of state, federal, and tribal agencies in addressing wildlife disease threats. Safeguarding Review recommendation #132 calls for expanding and improving the involvement of wildlife management agencies in emergency response.

Laboratory Systems

- Deployment of new biological product database – At the end of 2003, the Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) deployed Phase I of a new Oracle database (AIMS-LSRTIS) to track biologics establishment and product information. Deployment of this database will greatly enhance CVB's ability to track and search product characteristics and regulatory approvals for biological products in all stages of licensing. Approximately 93 employees were trained to use the new database and all are required to pass a proficiency test before working on the live system. Safeguarding Review recommendation #18 calls for upgrading capabilities of CVB.

Information Technology

- New software at port - A new software application, the Automated Quarantine Examination System (AQES), is currently being tested at the Miami Animal Import Center. AQES is considered to be phase 2 of the Online Animal Reservation System (OARS), which was launched in September 2003. AQES replaces current paper forms, used to record medical exam information, with electronic forms using handhelds. Veterinary Medical Officers (VMO's) and Animal Health Technicians (AHT's) use the handhelds to record medical examination data as the animals are arriving at the Miami Animal Import Center. Throughout the quarantine period, VMO's and AHT's perform daily rounds, checking animal vital signs (such as temperature and respiration rates) and observing animal behaviors (such as food and water consumption, brightness, alertness and responsiveness). If an animal is outside of normal parameters (i.e., high temperature or colic) an ALERT is automatically e-mailed to all VMO's so they are aware of the situation. Historical examination records for animals

currently in the quarantine facility can also be viewed using the handhelds. AQES also features a web-based Management Center (AQESMC) that will allow managers and other VS personnel to view current activity in the quarantine facility and produce reports. When an animal has finished the quarantine period, AQESMC will be used to generate the Quarantine Release form. The Quarantine Release form, VS Form 17-30 and, if necessary, VS Form 1-27 (for restricted movement of animals), will be generated, printed and signed for the shipper, and automated copies of all forms will be sent via email to the State Veterinarian and Area Veterinarian-in-Charge of the State of the animal's final destination. AQES will be tested for several weeks, and is planned to move to production in March 2004. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations encouraged the use of new technologies to improve processes (77, 82).

Organizational Dynamics

- Front-line survey and culture assessment – A survey of front-line APHIS employees was conducted in the fall of 2003. The survey collected opinions from front-line employees on program delivery, communications, and other topics. Survey results were provided to the APHIS management team and discussed at an offsite strategic planning meeting in early 2004. In February 2004, USDA launched an assessment of its culture which will identify gaps between current culture and a culture that will support the achievement of the Department's strategic goals. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations called for enhancing understanding of field level perspectives and improving communications (#s 28, 29, 140).

II. Implementation activities:

The Exclusion Issues Group held a conference call on February 10, 2004 to discuss its upcoming meeting in Miami on March 30-April 2, 2004. New group members have been recruited to replace those who could not continue to participate. New members are from VS, PPQ, and DHS. At the upcoming face-to-face meeting, the group will do an on-site visit to the ports (air and sea) to review the activities of VS, PPQ, and DHS as they pertain to Exclusion efforts.

The Organizational Dynamics/Communications Issue Group is reviewing and responding to comments received on two action plans.

The Information Technology Issue Group held a conference call on February 19th. Deb Millis briefed the group on the work of her technology coordination office. The Issue Group will hold a face-to-face meeting the week of March 29th in Miami. Issue group members have been attending technology conferences and will use ideas generated from these conferences in developing action plans.

The National Surveillance System Issue Group is preparing responses to comments received on action pans 1, 2, and 3. The Issue Group will meet April 6 to 8th to complete action planning.

The Veterinary Accreditation Issue Group met in St Louis on February 24 and 25th to review progress and revise action plans.

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